

BELGIAN (WALLOON)

In the 1850s roughly fifteen thousand Walloon Belgians settled in northeastern Wisconsin, extending across parts of Brown, Door, and Kewaunee Counties and constituting the largest such enclave in the United States. Attracted by the availability of farmland, they also chose this area because their language closely resembled that of Green Bay's large French-speaking population. Here Walloon French flourished as the first language of rural Belgians well into the 1930s.

10 I Went to Market

Sung by Alfred Vandertie, Brussels, Wisconsin, August 24, 1940.

Recorded by Helene Stratman-Thomas and Robert F. Draves.

Transcription and translation by Francoise Lempereur, 1981.

4166 A1

I went to market with a *pania volant* [loose shirt].

The first one I met was *one fèye (d') on avocat* [a lawyer's daughter].

CHORUS:

And I love you *èt d'totes lès manires* [and in all ways].

And I love you *mais vos vos m'aimez pas* [but you don't love me].

I went to market with a *pania volant* [loose shirt].

I asked for fifty cents and she said "*Je n'avos pas*" ["I haven't them"].

She went upstairs "*po li trover sè papa*" [to find her father for me].

She came downstairs: "*le bounome i n'èst pus là*" ["The man isn't there"].

I squeezed her so hard that I *cassè les deux bras* [broke her two arms].

And it cost me five hundred for to get *er les deux bras* [her two arms back].

We had been directed to Al Vandertie, a young man with a very fine voice. His songs included love songs in the Walloon dialect. A little song, "I Went to Market," was typical of the mixture of the language from the old world with that of the new. The lines were composed of a smattering of both English and French dialect. Mr. Vandertie had learned the song from Gust Mathy, an old resident of Brussels. (Stratman-Thomas 1940-1960: August 42, 1940)

Alfred Vandertie's ancestors, whose surname was originally Vangindertaelen, came to Wisconsin from Belgium's Charleroi region in the 1850s. A relatively young man when recorded in 1940, Vandertie (1910–1998) was born in the Door County hamlet of Brussels and, for most of his working life, was a tavern keeper in nearby Algoma. He sang Belgian songs throughout his long life. In the early 1970s he was recorded by the Belgian folklorist Francoise Lempereur, who took him to Belgium in 1974, where he was given a hero's welcome. Lempereur subsequently took him to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for the Smithsonian Institution's bicentennial Festival of American Folklife (Lempereur and Istasse 2011: 124). Vandertie was still singing for Belgian Days in Brussels when I first met him in 1993.

The 1880 census lists Gustave Mathy, Vandertie's source for this song, as a laborer who had been born in Belgium in 1851 and who was living with his fellow immigrant in-laws in De Pere. Mathy's mixed-language song of comic exaggeration about a country bumpkin's marketplace misadventures with a tricky lawyer's daughter has not been recorded in Belgium, however. According to Francoise Lempereur, who recorded identical lyrics from Vandertie in the 1970s, it is a "trilingual version of a bilingual song well known in French Canada" that was popularized by the *chanson* revivalist and Quebecois activist Gilles Vigneault (b. 1928). "It probably slid from Quebec to Wisconsin where Walloons transformed the text into French, a language not known to the performer, Alfred Vandertie" (Lempereur 1981; Lempereur and Istasse 2011: 120–124). Exilia Bellaire of Baraga, Michigan, recorded a French Canadian version of this song for Alan Lomax in 1938 (see notes to Lomax CD, track 9).

11 C'est l'café / It's the Coffee [the Kermiss Song]

Sung by Alfred Vandertie, Brussels, Wisconsin, August 24, 1940.

Recorded by Helene Stratman-Thomas and Robert F. Draves.

4166 A2

C'est l'café, l'café, l'café
Qui fait coqueter lès comères.
Abiye li coq'mwâr au fê
Po fê one boune tasse dè café!

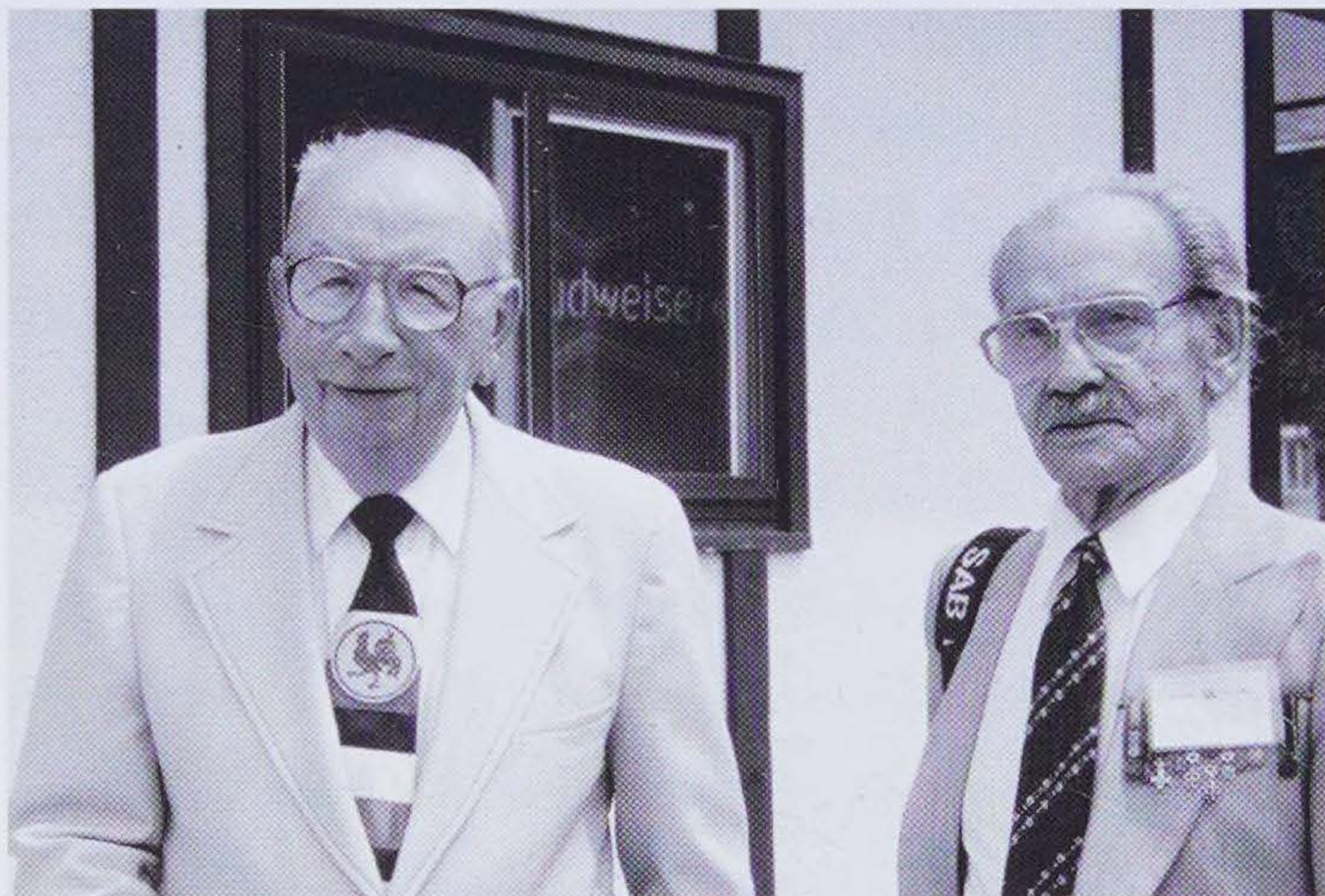
Tchantez, l' djon—nèsse;
Tchantez lès bias! Tchantez lès bèles!
Vinoz danser à l' grande fièsse di Brussèle.

It's the coffee, the coffee, the coffee
Which causes women to chatter.
Now then—a kettle on the stove
To make a nice cup of coffee!

Young people—sing!
Sing, smart boys! Sing, pretty girls!
Come and dance at the great
Brussels festival.

Po l' grande fièsse, dj'a l'èspérance
 Qui l'timps f rè bia sins misères.
 Dji vos-ègadje po l' preumêre danse.
 C'est l' mia qui tot qwè qui dj' pou dîre.

For the great festival I expect
 The weather to be perfect.
 I engage you for the first dance.
 It's the best thing I can say.



Alfred Vandertie and a Belgian friend, Belgian Days, Brussels, Wisconsin, 1993. (photo by author)

In late July 1993, seated in a car's front seat at the head of the Belgian Days parade and aided by a microphone with a speaker lashed to the car's windshield, Alfred Vandertie once again sang "C'est l'café," just as he had been singing it for at least sixty years. The November 21, 1933, edition of *The Manitowoc Herald-Times* reports on "the 75th anniversary

sary of the 'First Kermiss' given by the Ernest Haucke Post of the American Legion Sunday afternoon and evening" with "old-time dancing," Belgian pies, a brief speech from Green Bay's Belgian consul on the "the migration of Belgians to America" and the "hardships endured by them in early days," and "Belgian folk songs" sung by "Alfred Vandertie, Brussels."

"C'est l'café" was used for generations in Wisconsin to invite people to the annual *kermiss* celebration, an Old World fall festival—featuring good food, dancing, and song—held by local Belgian and Dutch Catholic communities to raise funds for the church and have a good time. Vandertie's particular lyrics derive from words composed in 1854 by the Walloon poet Charles Werotte (1795–1870). The tune "C'est l'amour, l'amour" has been used for many folksongs in the Belgian region of Namur (Lempereur 1981).



Emile Boulanger, Dyckesville, Wisconsin, 1946. (Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-25394)

12 Dance Tune

Played on fiddle by Emile Boulanger, Dyckesville, Wisconsin, August 31, 1946. Recorded by Helene Stratman-Thomas and Aubrey Snyder.

8461 A3

Emile Boulanger (1874–1965), a farmer and the son of Belgian immigrants, played many a quadrille for kermis and other old-time dances. According to Louis Ropson—a farmer, church organist, and violin maker in the Dyckesville area who wrote to Stratman-Thomas on June 1, 1946—Boulanger possessed perfect rhythm “for old square dances” (i.e., quadrilles) favored by the immigrant generation of the 1850s. “Mr. Boulanger learn it from an old man who came from Belgium. He settle up in the village of Lincoln,

Kewaunee County. His name was Mr. Thiry”—very likely Constantine Thiry (b. 1824), who arrived in Wisconsin in 1857. Stratman-Thomas’s field notes for August 31, 1946, tell us: “In order to have electricity, we asked permission to record in the village dance hall at Dyckesville. Snyder drove around to gather Mr. Ropson’s friends, Anton de Beck and Emile Boulanger. . . . Without Louis Ropson’s help as interpreter, we would have had difficulty, for although Mr. de Beck and Mr. Boulanger had been born in Dyckesville . . . and both were nearing eighty, they did not converse in English. . . . We recorded several dance tunes which Mr. Boulanger had played at dances ever since he was a boy. He too had made his own violin.”